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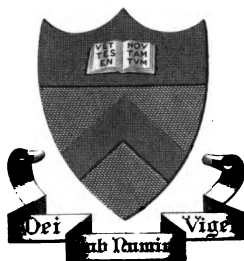
Old Robin and his proverb

Mrs. Henry F. Brock

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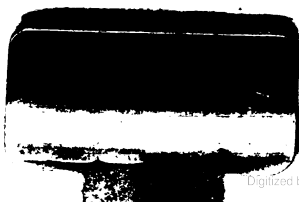
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OLD ROBIN AND THE CHILDREN.

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R B.

OLD ROBIN

AND HIS PROVERB.

BY
MRS. HENRY F. BROCK,
AUTHOR OF "BEAUTY OF TRUTH," ETC.

"When pride cometh, then cometh shame:
But with the lowly is wisdom."—Prov. xi. 2

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* Still downward goes Christ's way:

Wilt thou, with fond endeavour
To scale heaven's lofty towers,
Be vainly tolling ever?
The Saviour stoopeth low;
He who with him would rise,
With him must downward go.

"Down, therefore, O my mind!

Unlearn thy lofty thinking;
The light chaff mounts alone,
While solid grain is sinking.
Into the small, deep spring,
The waters freely flow,
Till it breaks forth a stream,
So thou, my soul, lie low."

From the German.

(RECAP)

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OLD ROBIN AND HIS PROVERB.

CHAPTER I.

'In returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength.'—ISA. xxx. 18.

"I WOULDN'T give a fig for a cup of tea without cream, Alice."

"That's the Eton fashion of talking," the sister replied, smiling as she spoke, "but not the Eton fashion of tea-drinking, I imagine."

"Do not speak of matters of which you are ignorant, Miss Alice. Do you mean to insinuate that we Etonians, brought up on the ancient royal foundation of Henry VI., ever condescend to potations of skimmed milk? And what's more," added Frank, "you can't say as much down here, in the old hall of the Davennes. Can she, mother? I appeal to you. Has not Alice a pious horror of touching anything better than skimmed milk, as long as

there are Goody Luffs and old Robins in the parish, who can appreciate the cream?"

"Fie upon you, Frank! said his sister. "It would be well for you if old Robin's proverb were yours."

"Well, so it would," said Frank; "and so it will be, I daresay, one of these fine days, when I am old, and wise, and gouty."

Alice shook her head at the merry boy. "I shall get old Robin to lecture you."

"And may I ask who this old Robin is?" said a voice from the opposite side of the breakfast-table.

"Alice will give you the necessary information, uncle," said Frank; "old Robin is her *beau-ideal* of human octogenarian excellence, in spite, wonderful to relate, of his having neither wig, spectacles, nor gold-headed cane."

Alice placed her hand upon her brother's lips. "You are a sad boy, Frank. I will tell you who old Robin is, dear uncle. He is one of papa's tenants, who has lived the greater part of his life in this parish. He is the very model of peace and contentment: Moreover, he is a wonderfully clever old man. He has read a great deal, thought a great deal, and

turned the reading and the thinking to good account. He is the oracle of the village, loved by all, for the kind word and smile he gives to every one, and respected by all, for his simple and unaffected piety."

"And the proverb, Alice," said the squire, "tell your uncle what the proverb is."

"We call it *the* proverb," said Alice, "because though he has a store of wise maxims and sayings, there is one in particular which old Robin is always bringing out, as the best advice, he says, he can give to young and old. It is a quaint saying,—

'The sweetest sleep is the sleep on water-porridge.' "

"There, Harry, what do you say to it?" said the squire.

"Well, I cannot say that I appreciate its literal beauties," said Captain Davenne, "seeing that we, sailors, are not supposed to favour decoctions that 'taste strong of the hold;' but I will accept the figurative sense of the maxim to any extent. It is a short and pithy sermon."

"And one," said the squire, "that the old man has practised all his life, I should say. I wish that all my tenants were half as contented as he. Whether the times be good or bad,

Robin has a thankful spirit. If his neighbours grumble, he always lectures them, winding up his discourses with his favourite proverb. And, as Alice says, he is clever. He comes out with things that are quite poetical,—eh! Alice? I remember, on one occasion, stopping my horse to have a word with Robin, who was walking slowly along the road. It was a bitterly cold day in the winter. He looked so blue, and so pinched by the cold, that I could not help saying to him, ‘My poor fellow, I wish it were summer-time for your sake.’ ‘Thank you, sir,’ he replied with his ready smile, ‘but the Lord knows the time best. I once read in a book, sir, “that in winter the earth waits for the spring, and while she waits she sleeps.” Now, sir, God forbid that I should wish to wake any of his creatures from a sleep which he has given.’ ‘Well, Robin,’ I said, ‘that’s a good thought.’ ‘Ay, sir,’ the old man continued, ‘and when I too am taking my rest under ground, the good Lord will waken me himself in his own good time.’ So I rode on,” added the squire, “and thought within myself, What are all these broad lands, these paternal acres worth,

in comparison of that man's simple faith in his God?"

"And do you remember, dear mother," rejoined Alice, after the short silence which followed upon the earnest words uttered by her father; "do you remember that day, when you and I took shelter from a shower in Robin's cottage, and found him at his frugal meal of bread and potatoes? It was the first time that I heard his proverb. Child as I was, I could not help telling him, that I wondered at his having no meat for his dinner. I recollect how he smiled and shook his head, and told me that the simplest fare brought the best sleep, and then he repeated the quaint old maxim."

"You make me quite anxious to see this wonderful man," said Captain Davenne.

"Do come and see him, uncle," said Alice. "Let me take you to him this very afternoon. Nothing I should like better than to be your guide."

"With all my heart, dear niece."

"We shall be sure to find him at home, or near home," Alice continued. "He is too old for regular work; perhaps we shall find him

in his little garden sitting among his bees and flowers."

The breakfast party broke up, each member of the family going to his respective employments for the morning. Idleness and selfishness were no dwellers in the Hall. The squire took his brother on a walking expedition through the fields, first premising that he had a long list of business to transact. He did not belong to that class of land-owners, which, it is to be hoped, is becoming more rare in the fair homes of England, men who, in a spirit of selfish reserve, are content to leave all personal contact with their labourers to a paid deputy. On the contrary, he strove, by going in and out among them, to make them feel that he was as much interested in their moral condition as in the progress of their labour, and, by the kindly word of sympathy which his manly heart knew when and how to give, he contrived to win their confidence and regard. And this the squire did, because he had taken One for his Master, who revealed and taught the sacredness of that tie of brotherhood which every human being should recognise in the face of his fellow-

creature ; who taught that reverence is due not merely to the superiority of rank or fortune, but to that of knowledge and goodness. He had heard these words, "*One is your Father,*" and "*all ye are brethren,*" and hearing, he had obeyed. In reward for which, he was daily reaping that which the rich and great may have if they will,—the hearty love and willing service of the working man.

The squire's wife went to her duties in the spirit of the matron of old, whose portrait the wisest of men has sketched as a model for all the "virtuous women." She looked well to the ways of her household, providing with diligent forethought for rich and poor, for all who should need or crave the hospitalities of the Hall. And her daughter went, not as the daughters of fashion, to her sofa and her novel, but to a succession of useful and unselfish employments. As soon as luncheon was over, Miss Davenne and her uncle started on their walk to Robin's cottage. Alice was not sorry that it was at some distance from the Hall, for she liked the prospect of a long talk with her favourite uncle. There was something about Captain Davenne which attracted both

old and young,—a certain penetrating warmth, under the influence of which even the most ungenial nature seemed to ripen into softness and bloom. Older than her father, Alice was accustomed to regard him with the greatest veneration; and now, after some years of separation, that he had returned to his brother's house, no one gave him a warmer welcome than his niece. She was never so happy as when seated by his side in old home corners, or walking with him through familiar paths, talking freely and unreservedly to him, and enjoying, as none could better, the companionship of one whose mind was full of aspirations after truth and goodness.


Alice stooped to gather a few violets from the carriage-road before they left the Hall gates. "Old Robin loves a bunch dearly," she said; "he is very fond of flowers."

"You are very kind to the old man, my child," said her uncle; "and you are right to be so. It is surely a great privilege to share in—that office which our God affirms to be his—the care of old age." Alice looked up. "Do you remember the text, Alice, '*Even to your old age I am he, and even to hoar hairs will*

I carry you. I have made and I will bear ; even I will carry and will deliver you ?”

“I am sure,” said Alice, “that what I give is nothing to what I receive. There is something to me so grand in that old man’s abiding principle of contentment.”

“You are right to use that word *principle*. We all have feelings of contentment at times ; but a fixed and deeply-rooted principle of contentment is what God alone can give.”

 “And when he does give it,” said Alice, “how beautiful it is to behold ; and how infectious it is, too ! I have often gone to Robin’s cottage in a restless and unsatisfied mood, and have left it in quite a different frame of mind. Do you know,” she said, placing her hand upon her uncle’s arm, “it has always seemed to me that contentment is less easy if you are rich ; why is it so ?”

“Perhaps the proverb contains the answer,” Captain Davenne replied, smiling. “If the water-porridge be the cause of the sweet sleep, then I suppose it must be the luxury of riches that robs us of rest. Certainly they multiply the sources of danger, because, even in the Christian duty of almsgiving, there

lurks a danger of self-consciousness and self-commendation. Yet after all, my child, there is but one way for rich or for poor; we cannot get contentment *out of God*. He must give us himself, and then only we find rest to our souls."

"Robin often says that. I told him once that I wished I was as contented and thankful as he, and he replied, 'Why not, dear lady? God gives to all liberally. He upbraideth not for the often asking.'"

"Happy old man," said Captain Davenne.

"He has beautiful thoughts," Alice went on. "Striking ideas, too. I told him that I knew I was very ungrateful ever to be discontented, placed as I was in the midst of health, and ease, and affluence. To my surprise he said, 'Nay, dear Miss Alice, do not look to such as these for contentment. The Father in heaven means you to find pleasure in them, but not content; for you know he often sees fit to take away all those things; but the peace and the rest he wills should always abide. Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. And perhaps,' he added, 'the peace is all the more sure when

the health, and the ease, and the riches are gone.' Poor Robin ; I knew he was thinking then of his wife, who died last year. But there he is himself, I do think. Yes, seated yonder under those trees at the end of the village green,—that is his favourite spot. Do you see him, uncle ?”

“Yes, I do; and there is a group of children round him,—are they your school-children, Alice ?”

“Yes,” she replied ; “he is seldom to be seen without one or two of them, he is such a favourite with them all. From the eldest to the youngest, they all love old Robin; and no wonder, for he has an inexhaustible fund of stories to suit all ages. He is the Solomon of the village. Our schoolmaster says that Master Robin teaches more geography in one hour on the village green, than he can do in a whole week with all his school-books, spectacles, and rod.”

“He must have had good opportunities for instruction,” said Captain Davenne.

“I have heard my father say that Robin has had long illnesses during his life,” Alice replied; “and that being unable to work as

much as others, he had spent a good deal of his time in reading, the taste for which he had from his earliest years."

The children were so engrossed with their old friend that they did not perceive the approach of Alice and her uncle. It was a pretty scene. Artist and poet could desire nothing better. The tree under which the old man was seated was the veteran oak of the village. Under its wide-spreading branches generation after generation had played in youth and rested in age,—the child climbing its boughs for a treasure of acorns, and the old man resting peacefully under its shelter, wondering whether the old tree remembered its youth as calmly as he did his own. The children were of different ages. The little ones had gathered close to the old man,—one of them was wreathing his stick with daisies.

"The poetry of nature is here," whispered Alice to her uncle.

"Yes," he replied, "in her analogies and her contrasts; the fresh young grass springing up at the foot of the old tree, and the children's faces pressing round the aged man."

The boys jumped up when they saw Miss

Davenne. Robin himself attempted to rise from his seat, but Alice would not let him. A bright smile overspread the old man's withered features; it was like a December sun upon a bleak landscape. Alice was evidently a great favourite with him.

"Good afternoon, Robin; we were coming to pay you a visit. This is my uncle, Captain Davenne. I don't think you will remember him, for he has been abroad so many years."

Old Robin grasped the kindly offered hand.

"I will sit down beside you, my good friend," said Captain Davenne. "This is an inviting seat."

"Yes, sir, thanks to the squire. He was good enough to have it put up here for the use of the old folks."

"You are well surrounded," said Captain Davenne. "I have heard what a famous hand you are at amusing the little ones and instructing the elder ones. It is a great privilege, Robin, to be able to do that. An old writer says that 'he who makes a child happy is a co-worker with God.'"

The old man looked kindly upon the little group at his feet. "They are bonnie things,

sir, and I like to be with them, and see their bright faces looking up like flowers into the blue sky. I like to tell them of One above who hears the cry of the young birds, and who once said in the streets of Jerusalem, '*Suffer the little children to come unto me.*'"

"And these little ones love Master Robin," said Alice, turning to the children; "and they love his beautiful stories, do they not?"

"Yes, yes," they replied in a chorus of silver bells.

"Sometimes," Robin resumed, "sometimes I am obliged to scold the little ones; am I not, Jeanie?" and the old man raised his stick and gently touched a curly head. "Shall I tell Miss Davenne," he continued, "why it was I told you the story of 'Happy Nancy?'" The little girl did not reply.

"Why, ma'am," said Jeanie's brother, with a merry twinkle in his blue eye, "I will tell you how it was. Jeanie had been saying that she wished she was a grand lady, to ride in a carriage and wear fine clothes; and Master Robin told her that the finest thing was to have no wish at all, but to be always contented. And then he told us about

'Happy Nancy,' and bade Jeanie try to be like her."

"And Jeanie will try," said Alice, looking kindly at the blushing child.

"I think it is a pity that we have lost the story," said Captain Davenne, "for we are all of us apt to be discontented. Is it one of your own stories, Robin, or is 'Happy Nancy' a real individual?"

Robin gave a significant shake of the head. "I am no great hand, sir, at making up stories as some people do. I like best to tell the children something I have read, though I can't say I always believe what I find in books. Don't you think, sir, that there is a great deal of pretence in some stories, what I call dressing up, giving them colours that don't belong to them, just to make them sound better?" *conflant*

"Very true, Robin. I remember myself going to one village which I had seen described as the loveliest place in the world, and I found nothing but a few untidy cottages, and some pigs on the common." *mal propre*

"That's just what it is," said Robin, laughing. "It's all make-believe now-a-days, from *world's pretence and crime and*

the clever people who sit at home and write stories, to the cunning fellows who cheat the simple folks, as little Jeanie's mother was cheated last fair-time, — eh ! boys ?”

“How was that, Robin? I never heard of it,” said Alice.

“Well, ma'am,” the old man replied, trying to look grave, “she gave half-a-crown for a canary bird, for the sake of his pretty coat, and another half-a-crown for a fine cage to put him in ; and the next morning when she looked at the cage, lo ! the canary bird was gone, and a little hedge-sparrow was in his place ! The little creature had given himself a good bath, and had washed off his fine yellow coat. Poor Mary ! it was too bad to be so taken in.”

The children shouted with laughter.

“Well, but to return to your ‘Happy Nancy,’” said Captain Davenne. “I hope she was no pretence.”

“Nay, sir, I should think not. The district-visitor gave it to me last week. It was printed on a fly-leaf ; but I had read it some time ago in the *Christian Treasury*. I have it in my pocket, if you would like to look at it.”

The old man took a leaf of printed paper out of his pocket, and gave it to Captain Davenne.

"Will one of you read it to me, boys?" asked the captain.

"Let Alan read it," said Alice, while she took the paper from her uncle and gave it to the eldest boy of the group, whose countenance expressed a degree of intelligence uncommon to boys of his age. So Alan began—

HAPPY NANCY'S SECRET; OR, CONFIDENCE
IN GOD.



There once lived in a old brown cottage, a solitary woman. She tended her little garden, and knit and spun for a living. She was known everywhere from village to village by the name of "Happy Nancy." She had no money, no family, no relatives, and was half blind, quite lame, and very crooked. There was no comeliness in her, and yet there, in that homely, deformed body, the great God, who loves to bring strength out of weakness, had set his royal seal.

"Well, Nancy, singing again?" would the chance visitor say, as he stopped at her door.

"Oh, yes, I'm for ever at it."

"I wish you'd tell me your secret, Nancy. You are all alone, you work hard, you have nothing very pleasant surrounding you; what is the reason you're so happy?"

"Perhaps it's because I haven't got anybody but God," replied the good creature looking up. "You see rich folks like you depend upon their families and their houses; they've got to be thinking of their business, of their wives, and children, and then they're always mighty afraid of troubles ahead. I ain't got anything to trouble myself about, you see, 'cause I leave all to the Lord. I think, well if he can keep this great world in such good order—the sun rolling day after day, and the stars shining night after night, make my garden things come up the same season after season—he can certainly take care of such a poor simple thing as I am; and so, you see, I leave all to the Lord, and the Lord takes care of me."

"Well, but Nancy, suppose that a frost should come after your fruit trees are all in blossom, and your little plants out; suppose—"

"But I don't suppose; I never can suppose; I don't want to suppose, except that the Lord

will do everything right. That's what makes you people unhappy—you're all the time supposing. Now, why can't you wait till the suppose comes as I do, and then make the best of it."

"Ah, Nancy! it's pretty certain you'll get to heaven, while many of us, with all our worldly wisdom, will have to stay out."

"There you are at it again," said Nancy, shaking her head, "always looking out for some black cloud. Why, if I was you, I'd keep the devil at arm's length, instead of taking him right into my heart. He'll do you a desperate sight of mischief."

She was right. We do take the demon of care, of distrust, of melancholy foreboding, of ingratitude, right into our heart. We canker every pleasure with this gloomy fear of coming ill. We seldom trust that blessings will enter, or hail them when they come. We should be more child-like toward our heavenly Father, believe in his love, learn to confide in his wisdom, and not in our own; and above all, "wait till the suppose come, and then make the best of it." Depend upon it, earth would seem an Eden if you would follow Happy Nancy's rule, and

never give place in your bosom to imaginary evils.

"Thank you, my boy," said Captain Davenne, when Alan had finished reading; "it is well worth hearing. We must all try to emulate Happy Nancy, and never suppose."

"We must make one exception," said Alice; "just one for to-day. Suppose we hear Robin's lesson to the elder boys; you know, Robin, you have promised to teach them something. They have waited very patiently, and now you must reward them."

"Just as you please, ma'am," said the old man, "if your uncle will not be tired. Now, then, little ones, you may run away and chase the butterflies on the green. Only do not hurt them, for they are God's creatures."

The children obeyed, and were soon far away merry in play. The elder boys grouped themselves a little closer to their old friend, who began at once.

CHAPTER II.

"The Lord is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works."—Ps. cxlv. 9.

"With the heart man believeth unto righteousness."—Rom. x. 10.

"I WAS going to tell them, sir, some interesting facts about South America. They are lessons from God's creation, which prove how God has thought, and planned, and contrived so as to give us temporal mercies and comforts. First of all," Robin continued, addressing the boys, "I must tell you that there is a certain part of South America where it never rains."

"Never rains!" exclaimed a voice. "Ah! I wish we had it so here; our holidays would never be spoilt."

"Stay a moment, Charlie," said Alice; "how would the flowers grow in that little garden you are so fond of, and what would become of the green fields and trees? You would have no dear old oak like this."

The boy looked thoughtful. "Then, ma'am, are there no fields, no trees, in that part of South America?"

"Yes, my lad," said Robin, finer and larger than any you have seen in this country. And that is just the thing I was going to explain to you. Rain, you know, comes from the clouds; we can't have rain without them. Now, the reason that there are no clouds over that part of South America is, because there are certain winds there which carry the clouds in such a direction, and with such rapidity, that they are borne past that part of the country. These winds are called the 'trade winds,' because they befriend the trading people who, as the Bible says, *'go down to the sea in ships, and do business in great waters.'* I have often heard my brother, who was a sailor, speak about these winds," Robin added, turning to Captain Davenne. "He said they could not do without them. I don't myself understand much about it."

"That is not surprising," said the captain; "we sailors have a better chance in such matters, you know. It is quite true that vessels could not cross certain seas called 'tropical seas,' but for the trade winds. Thus it is that our merciful God provides these winds which are so strong that, as you said

just now, they carry the clouds past one portion of the country in South America. I have been in those seas myself, Robin, and often when I have heard some profane word from the sailors' mouths I have said to myself, 'How kind, how forbearing is God! he pours mercies upon thankless men.'"

Old Robin shook his head. "Don't you think, sir, that men would love and serve God better if they made themselves acquainted with some of his wonderful works?"

"It ought to be so," Captain Davenne replied, "but, alas! it is not always so. The head and the heart but too often part company; one may be full of knowledge, while the other is full of enmity against God."

"That is true, sir," said Robin; "may the good Lord have mercy upon us, and create in us a new heart, for Jesus Christ his sake."

There was a short silence in the group, for the old man, with his simple and reverent faith, had raised his hat while he uttered those few words of prayer.

Charlie was the first to speak. He was impatient to know how the trees could grow

without rain. "Please, Master Robin, how about the clouds that fly so fast?"

"It's a wonderful thing, as you shall hear, my boy. There are mountains there so very high that the clouds cannot pass without striking them. Those trade-winds which, as I told you, carry the clouds past the flat country, bear a large portion of them against the sides of this mountain-range, and they accumulate there in perpetual moisture. This moisture floatsoff in plentiful dews towards the dry plains over which the clouds have passed, and water the fields with abundant dew."

"Please, Robin," said Alan, "I don't see it quite clear. Will you be so good as to say that over again?"

Robin looked towards Captain Davenne. "You will do it better than I can, sir."

"Well, my boy," said the captain, "the point you must notice is the wisdom of God's contrivance, which provides for the different needs of all his creatures. The trade-winds, you have heard just now, are sent for the special benefit of the trading vessels in the tropical seas, which otherwise could not get on in their course. But in order to supply this

want one part of the land is deprived of the necessary clouds. You see that, do you not, Alan?"

"Yes, sir; these winds carry the clouds so fast that they are borne past that part of the country."

"Exactly so. Now observe the compensation for this loss of clouds there. The Creator has placed those great and high mountains, the Andes, in such a situation as exactly suits the emergency. They run along the edge of the land, and are a good deal higher than the usual height of clouds. We see the reason for this. They intercept those passing clouds, and keep them as a storehouse for the wants of the neighbouring country."

"Oh, I see it now, sir, thank you! Then they get very heavy dews in the place of rain?"

"Just so; and now, Alan, is it not a wonderful proof of a Creator whose wisdom is equal to his love?"

"And there is another place," said old Robin, "where it never rains either, and where the arrangement is different. We must doubly admire the wisdom of God when we see different arrangements made in dif-

ferent places for producing the same end. It does not rain in Egypt, and there are no mountains like the Andes to intercept the clouds, nor passing clouds to be condensed, and yet we know that the crops are plentiful in Egypt."

"Yes," said Alice, "Egypt is called the granary of the world."

"It is the river Nile that overflows the land, is it not?" said Alan.

"It is so," the old man replied; "and what we ought to notice in this fact is, how many circumstances must combine to produce this end. First, the country must be quite flat; next, the river must be large enough to water so large a tract of land, the waters must overflow at the right season. They say that the Nile rises in the mountains called 'the Mountains of the Moon,'" Robin continued.

"That was the generally received opinion," interrupted Captain Davenne, "but recent investigation shows that the source of the Nile is a vast lake. The periodical rise of the Nile is caused by the overflow of this lake during the rainy season. But this makes no difference with regard to what you are saying, Robin. It does not signify where the waters rise, so

long as there *is* an overflow of the river, and the flood covers the plains of Egypt at the right season of the year. Thus we see that the same Hand which arranged so wonderfully for the supply of rain in that part of South America, had planned similar mercies for another part of the world, only by different means."

"Yes, sir," said the old man, "and yet the wretched men who say, 'There is no God,' would teach us that all these mercies come by chance. They talk of the 'laws of nature,' but don't you see, Alan (for the boy's eager eyes were fixed on the speaker), they can't tell us how it is that the 'laws of nature' which raised the Andes, did not raise a similar mountain on the plains of Egypt; and if nature contrived the flat grounds of Egypt to receive the coming flood, why nature did not level the hills and mountains of South America.

"Yes, indeed," said Captain Davenne, "why does not inundation answer on the coast of Chili, and dew upon the sands of Egypt?"

"Do tell us something more like this, good Robin," said Alan. "I suppose there are other facts like these?"

"Yes, my boy, there are several. I could tell you about Greenland—the land, you know of snow and ice. No trees grow there, and therefore no wood is to be had. What, then, shall the Greenlanders do for fuel, and for making their boats, and spears, and fishing-tackle?"

"Ah! what, indeed?" said Charlie, "I can't guess at all."

"The sailors tell us," continued Robin, "that they use train oil for fuel. This is supplied to them by the whales that are caught in great numbers near those shores. And as for wood, we are told that certain currents of the ocean bring large trunks and portions of trees from other countries, and lodge them between the islands, ready for use when the Greenlander wants them.* This seems to me very wonderful, sir," said Robin, turning to the captain, "these poor creatures cannot tell where these trees are torn from, or how they are swept away—all they know is, that since their own islands do not produce the trees they want, the waves of the sea bring them to their

* For these and similar illustrations see Nelson on "Infidelity, its Cause and Cure."

shores. Ah, sir! one longs to be a missionary, to go to these Greenlanders and tell them that it is a Father's hand that sends them all these things."

quite a new
"Alas! Robin, God has ignorant and thankless children in every part of his world. How few of us care to inquire into the wonders of God's creation! See how we forget the Giver all the while we are using his gifts for our life, health, and enjoyment. Earth, air, and water are by constant adaptations made to work together for our good, and yet we go on in our sin and self, living without God and without hope in the world."

"That is very true, sir," said the old man, with a sad smile, "it's truly wonderful altogether."

"I never heard anything of this before," said Alan, "and I am sure it's well worth remembering."

The boy had listened to the last words spoken by the captain with intense interest. There was a look of earnest inquiry in his large, dark eyes, unusual in boys of his age. In it one could recognise the early workings of an ardent spirit craving for knowledge of the unseen world. Surely, if there be one

phase of the life in the human soul more interesting in the eyes of angels and of God, it is the season when thought begins to do her work in the energy and glow of youth, when the human first responds to the touch of the divine, and the craving spirit goes forth in its restless quest of God.*

"Do you remember anything more, Master Robin?" Alan continued, "it is better than all the story-books in the world."

"That's rightly spoken," the old man replied; "God has given us two wonderful books of his own making, and we can read and never tire of them. The book of nature is one, and the blessed Bible is the other. But mark what I say, Alan, my boy, we shall never see clearly to read and understand either of these books, unless we endeavour *to do God's will. We must obey before we understand.* If we do what God bids us, we shall soon find that he gives us more and more knowledge."

"It is so difficult," said the boy looking up into the quiet face of the old man.

* "L'homme a perdu Dieu, et, toutefois, le malheureux ne peut s'en passer—*Man has lost God, and yet, unhappy man! he cannot do without God.*"—BOSSUET.

"So it is, Alan ; but can we wonder at it, when we know what suffering it cost the blessed Saviour to bring us back to God?"

"I wish," said the boy, "that Will Davis, my cousin, could hear what you have been saying; he works at the factory, you know. He is getting into strange ways, and reads strange books—books that try to prove that the Bible is *false*. I wonder what he would say to all these wonderful things you have been telling us. He says that everything came by chance."

"Poor, sinful body," said the old man, shaking his head sorrowfully, "he does not see that it is far more difficult to prove that chance can bring such wonderful contrivance and results together."

"You are quite right," rejoined Captain Davenne. "The unbeliever is the most credulous of men. He believes things which the Christian does not believe, and which are far more difficult of belief. For instance, in those facts about Greenland, let him tell us how it is that the whale *happens* to swim nearest to those who most need his flesh. If we should wish to use nothing but train oil for fuel, we

could not do so ; because we do not find whales near our coast. Does chance make this difference?"

"And the trees, sir," said Alan, "that is wonderful. Is it really true that they are brought by the waves to those shores?"

"We are told so on good authority," the captain replied. "We are informed that a certain current of the ocean, or certain winds, or, indeed, both united, bear along the timber from other lands, and lodge it between the islands which so stand as to make a sort of store-house. Now, when we notice the fact that as trees are thus borne along the shores of France, or Spain, or England, where they are not wanted, but that in more frozen climes, where they *are* wanted, the supply is brought, it certainly is difficult to say, 'There is no Designer at work, or if there is one, that he is not a wise and kind Father.'"

"Oh," said Alice, clasping her hands, "how is it possible there can be a single infidel in the world, while men have eyes to see and read God's works!"

"It's the heart that's wrong, dear lady," said the old man ; "the heart is at enmity

against God, and that is why men love darkness rather than light, falsehood rather than truth. They *wish* the Bible to be false, and so by degrees they persuade themselves that it is so."

"Those words of our Lord are very clear on this subject," Captain Davenne rejoined, "'*because their deeds are evil.*' It is an awful fact, that every act of sin brings darkness into the soul, hiding the truth of God from our minds, as well as the presence of God from our hearts."

"And on the other hand, sir," said Robin, "what a blessed thing it is, that by doing the will of God we get to know what is truth. Ah, sir! I had a good mother, she taught me this; she was always so earnest on this point. 'Robin,' she would say, 'if once you begin to disobey God's plain commands, you will soon become a sceptic and an unbeliever.' And she was right, sir. After her death I fell into idle company; like many young men, I began by breaking the Sabbath, then I came to neglect my Bible, and to give up praying, and, at last, I went to hear free-thinkers talk, and their arguments seemed to me very fine, and just to

suit me; I *wished* them to be true. I could not see the ignorance and stupidity that was in them, because sin had darkened my mind, and defiled my heart."

"And what brought you out of all this, Robin?" asked Miss Davenne.

"God was very merciful to me," said the old man. "He sent me a long and heavy sickness, but it was a blessed one, for in it I heard his voice, '*Return unto me, for I have redeemed thee.*' And then, lady, I felt and knew that it was true, that Jesus is a great Saviour, and man a great sinner." The old man raised his eyes towards the blue heavens above him, the calm beauty of which seemed reflected upon his aged features.

"Ah, Robin!" said Captain Davenne, "you have hit upon the right thing, the all-powerful remedy for Infidelity and Atheism. All the arguments in the world are as nothing in comparison with that belief of the truth which comes from a knowledge and a consciousness *within*. When the soul feels its sorest need of a Saviour, and sees, too, that Jesus is all that he needs, then he does not want arguments to convince him of the existence of God.

You might as well persuade a satisfied man that he is hungry, as you can persuade such an one that there is no God, no Saviour, no Holy Ghost."

There was a short silence, broken at length by Alan, who again fixed his deep eyes upon the old man. "Were you really once an infidel, Master Robin?"

The old man looked very grave while he made reply: "I am thankful to say, my lad, that I never went so far as to say with the the fool, 'There is no God;' but alas! I sinned greatly by giving heed to wretched and ignorant men who, as Satan's messengers, went about to teach lies. My mind was filled with unbelieving thoughts, with doubts of God's justice, and his love, and with foolish and absurd suggestions against the truth of his word. Ah! those were sad days," continued the old man, bending his head upon his clasped hands. "There would be little peace for me now in remembering them, if it were not for that blessed word, '*The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin.*'"

"It is a striking fact," said Captain Davenne, "that the human mind will swallow any

amount of falsehood in arguments against religion, which it will not do in matters of this world. Nothing, surely, better proves the utter departure of the heart from God."

"It is pride," said old Robin, looking up, "pride that works in man rebellion and unbelief. Ah, sir! I often think of my mother, she had a favourite proverb—"

The old man stopped, perceiving a smile upon Alice's face. "Go on, Robin," she said, "go on, I have already told my uncle you had a pet saying, and I am glad that you have come out with it at last."

"It is a quaint old saying, sir, but a true one,—

'The sweetest sleep is the sleep on water porridge.'

My mother used to say that it held as good for the soul as for the body, for that most of us were, like Sodom, destroyed by pride and fullness of bread."

"That is well thought," said Alice. "I have never taken the proverb in that sense. I had only applied it to your usual contentment in humble fare, Robin."

"It's a short text, lady, for a long sermon.

The blessed Lord was meek and lowly in heart, and it is the poor in spirit that shall inherit his kingdom."

"You had a great blessing, Robin, in a good mother," said Captain Davenne.

"A great blessing, indeed, sir; there's no telling what a mother's faith and prayers can do for an erring son. I believe that it was in answer to them that God brought me back from the sin and misery of doubt and perplexity. And do you know, sir, I can remember the time when I first asked my mother the meaning of the proverb; yes, and the very place, too. I can see the little bed in the corner as plain as possible, though it is such a long time ago, and the sweet look on my mother's face as she said to me, 'It means that we must be happy and thankful with whatever God gives, and not wish to have great things, or to be great people.' I recollect, too, her last words as she kissed us, 'Love God, my children, and then you will love all he gives, whether it be small or great.' Is it not strange, sir, that I should remember all this as well as if it had happened only yesterday? How is it?"

"One reason, I imagine," the captain re-

plied, "is that we have gone over the facts of our childhood so often that they have become more fixed in our minds. Another is, that our minds are more quiet in old age; the hurry and work of middle age are over, and our thoughts are less distracted, and are therefore able to recall past images in their first freshness."

"Happy that old age," said Alice, "that can fill its quiet hours with such pleasant pictures! Well, Robin, I wish that every one was as contented and thankful as you. I am always the better for listening to you. But we must say good-bye now, for we shall be wanted at home."

"You are always very kind, lady, in bearing with an old man's long stories."

"If there had been time," Alice continued, "I should have asked you to tell my uncle how it happened that the proverb became so much impressed on your mind."

"You are too good, dear lady, to make so much of my simple story."

"I propose," said Captain Davenne as he rose, "that our good friend should fix a day for telling us. I am sure we shall all be very glad to hear it."

The old man replied with a grateful look, "If you have no objection to these young things being present, I should like them to hear it."

The boys had risen from their seats on the grass when Miss Davenne had moved, and were now waiting eagerly for her reply. The assent was readily given, and the day fixed. A few more kindly words were spoken by Captain Davenne to the old man, and the group dispersed; the boys bounding across the common, the young lady and her uncle taking the path that led to the Hall, and old Robin, with his staff (that last friend of feeble humanity), turning toward his cottage.

CHAPTER III.

"The meek will He guide in judgment;
The meek will He teach His way."—Ps. xxv. 9.

THE evening after this conversation, old Robin sat in his little garden among his bees, his flowers, and the parting rays of the sun which was sinking behind the neighbouring hills. The old man was never so happy as, when seated at his cottage door, he watched the bright glories of the evening sky. The love of nature is strongest at the beginning and the end of life. The child has no care for the morrow, but gives himself up to the wealth that lies around him in the rich gifts of earth, air, and sky; and the old man returns to the same enjoyment when the toil of life is done, and he is waiting in the cool of the evening for a brighter morrow in a better home. On this evening, however, Robin's solitude was destined to be broken. Two figures presented themselves at the garden gate.

"May we come in, Master Robin?" The voice was Alan's.

"Come in, my lad, and welcome," was the old man's ready response.

"This is my cousin Will," said the youth, pointing to his companion. "Here, Will, sit down on this bit of grass. The fact is, Robin," said the lad coming to the point at once; "the fact is, I have persuaded Will to come here for two reasons. One is that he may hear something good from your lips, and the next is—" and here Alan stopped short. His cheek became suddenly red.

"I will tell the truth for you," said his cousin. "Alan is in a state of great remorse, Master Robin, because he went with me this morning to a lecture at the Town Hall of Coniston, and the only way I could pacify him was by letting him bring me in his turn to you, that you might lecture me, I suppose.

The eyes of the speaker were dark and lustrous, but they lacked that peculiar expression which bears witness on some faces to the joy and rest which the soul within has found.

"What was the lecture about, my son?" asked the old man.

"It was a lecture against the Bible," Alan replied impetuously, "against the Book you

love so much, Robin. I was a fool to be persuaded by Will. I knew I was doing wrong all the time, and yet I went. I am sure that if I had known how wretched that man's words could **make me I would never have gone.**"

Old Robin shook his head sorrowfully. "The tree of error bears deadly fruit, Alan, and they that will pluck and eat must be content to suffer. And thou, young man," he added, turning to Alan's companion, "wilt thou make thine own destruction tenfold more sure by dragging a fellow-creature after thee?"

"Don't blame him, Robin," said Alan, "for it was my own fault that I went."

"The lecturer was said to be such a clever man," said the other, "that many of us were tempted to go and hear him. But, indeed, Master Robin, I will not make myself out better than I am. I confess to you that I have sometimes doubted the truth of the Bible. There are arguments against it which I find it difficult to answer."

"May the good Lord forgive you," said the old man, "even as I had need to be forgiven when, in the days of my youth and folly, I gave heed to the same falsehoods. Listen to

me, my son. There are but two reasons why men are infidels. The first is because they love darkness more than light; the other is because they are ignorant. Yes, Will Davis, those that appear the most learned are just the most ignorant; and, alas! they choose to remain so. Young man, you say that you find it difficult to believe; but answer me this question, do you *wish* to believe?"

"Well, Master Robin, I **have** really never asked myself that question."

"Ah!" said the old man, "if you *wished* to believe you would use all your diligence to read everything that was in favour of the Bible; whereas you will confess, if you are honest, **that** for one argument that honours the word of God, you have read ten, ay twenty, that blasphemes it."

Old Robin kindled as he spoke. The radiance of the sunlight which was falling on the faces of the young men, was as nothing in comparison of that diviner glow which bore witness on the aged features to the energy of truth within.

"You may not like to hear it said you are ignorant, my son," he went on; "but if you

will take the trouble to examine into what scoffers say, you will find that they are ignorant of Bible facts, Bible history, and Bible language. Yet these are the men who call themselves too learned to believe in God's book."

"Well, Master Robin," said Alan, "I was disgusted by the lecturer's objections, and by his unfairness, too. About the Tower of Babel, for instance, he actually said that the Bible could not be true, because it taught men that this tower would have been built up to heaven, and that God came down to prevent it, fearing lest men should find a method of their own for getting into heaven."

"We ought not to be surprised at anything these men assert," Robin replied, "for cavilling and doubting always end in unfairness and untruth. The building of the tower, as you know, had nothing to do with getting into heaven, and yet if you had not read your Bible, this man might have led you to believe otherwise. It is a melancholy fact that men are everywhere receiving and listening to every kind of infidel objections, without making themselves acquainted with the mass of evidence which is on the side of truth. They

seize upon the difficulties, but do not care for any further testimony. Why is this? Ah! the answer is too plain; it is because men *love* darkness rather than light."

"And only think, Robin," said Alan again, "that lecturer said that the Bible was immoral in its teachings, because it speaks of certain men as good men, when, at the same time, it relates their having committed the worst sins! David was his pet example."

"How ignorant that man must be," said Robin. "Why, if his mind had not been perverted and made crooked, he would see that the Bible does not sanction or approve of David in his sins; it simply states those sins as matters of fact. This is very much in favour of the Bible. It is the only historical book on earth which relates matters of naked fact. No writer in that wonderful volume ever praises the goodness of the men he is writing about. No praise, or flattery, is used, as there is in other books of history. On the contrary, the sacred historians relate plainly and truthfully the sins into which God's people have fallen. It is impossible they should do otherwise," added the old

man, laying his hand impressively upon Alan's arm, "not only because they are the records of truth, but because they seek to teach us what man is when he falls away from God. When we read of the treachery and conceit of Peter, and of the grievous fall of David, we see that man is never safe but when he leans upon God. And, as the whole teaching of the Bible points to this truth, we cannot be surprised when God's word makes it plain to us by *illustration* as well as precept."

"There's something in that," said Alan's companion.

The old man went on. "David had a fallen nature as every one of God's children has, and David was a great king. With all his wealth and all his triumphs, the surprise is that he did not sooner fall into sin. And when he did fall, grievous as it was, see how great was his repentance! Could any one have humbled himself as he did, who had not the Spirit of God in his heart? Think of that 51st Psalm (in which he records his sins and his deep repentance), and remember that king David knew that it would be sung be-

fore his court, and before all Jerusalem; that it would be the memorial of his sin to all generations.. His sorrow for that sin must have been very real to enable him to face all this."

"This cannot be denied, I confess," said young Davis.

"Ah, my sons!" said old Robin very gravely, "we would not be so ready to blame the Bible for recording the sins of many of God's people, if we understood a little more of that repentance which so filled their hearts as to lead them to go out and weep bitterly."

The young men were silent. The earnestness of the old man's words, together with the seriousness of his manner, and the tone of sorrow which seemed lovingly to bind the whole, all made a deep impression on their minds. The candour of youth, too, was still alive in their hearts, as yet undestroyed by the deceits and sophistries of a world which is at enmity with God.

"May I tell you another objection which that man made against the truth of the Bible?" said Alan. "He declared it impossible to believe in the resurrection of the body, when we know that after death our bodies dissolve

and mingle with the dust or are scattered over the earth."

"Stay a moment," said old Robin, rising from his seat. "I have a book in doors which has some striking words on this subject. You shall read them for yourselves. There is light enough in the sky, so I will fetch the book."

The old man went into the cottage, and soon returned with a small book in his hand. It was a great favourite of his, to judge from the way in which passages were marked and under-lined.

"Here is the chapter," he said; "now read, Alan, read it aloud."

"God tells the righteous that their bodies, although made out of the materials belonging to their present frames of earth, will shine, and be very splendid (1 Cor. xv. 40-45). God can make very durable and very glorious things out of materials the very opposite of firmness or of brilliancy. He has done this. Of all the substances with which we are acquainted, we esteem diamond the hardest and the most glittering. Charcoal is as black and as crumbling as any other body known to us, yet these two bodies are the same. The

learned know, the ploughboy does not, that the difference between charcoal and diamond is, that the Creator has ordered a *different arrangement of particles*. The same materials are differently placed, that is all. If any are wishing for a body more beautiful than they now have, they may be assured that God can, if he choose, take our present fragile, corruptible forms of clay, and make out of them something exceedingly glorious. '*It is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory.*' Out of a certain spot of earth a flower arose, which waved in splendour; the soil from which it grew was very black." *

"What do you say to that?" Robin asked of young Davis, when Alan had finished.

"I like it very much," said the young man frankly. "Can you spare the book to me for a week or so? I have a nice bit of time for reading now in the evening. I should not mind reading more of that book."

"I will lend it you gladly," said Robin, "it's a good thing to read on the right side. But, O my sons, take an old man's advice, '*Begin to pray.*' All the reading, all the

* Rev. D. Nelson, M.D.

thinking, and all the talking will not avail, unless you ask the Spirit of truth to help you. Boys, the time is all too short, that we should let the work of life go by, on the *chance* of its not being true. Don't waste this precious time in doubt and unbelief, but get you to your Saviour, and ask him to teach you those words which alone can make you a soft pillow when you lie down to die: '*Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief.*' "

"We must wish you good evening now, Master Robin," said Alan. "I think I can promise you never to go to those places again."

The old man was silent. His eye was resting on the evening clouds which, with crimson edges, lay in masses above the setting sun.

"How beautiful it is!" said Alan.

"Ay," said the old man, "and there is one thing more beautiful, more wonderful still, and that is God's good patience. We are ready enough to use his gifts: to sow and reap under the blessed sun in the heavens, and be warmed and gladdened by his rays; but we care not to seek after the Giver himself, and we

refuse to believe in his love. Verily, his passions fail not."

"Well, Master Robin," said young Davis, "I would give something to have your opinions."

"Don't talk of opinions," said the old man; "when a man talks of his 'opinions,' we may be sure that pride is not far off. Nay, my lads, you must get the lowly mind, the empty heart, if you would see God. He satisfieth the hungry soul. Farewell, my sons. Take heed to yourselves, lest with all your books, and all your learning, and all your *opinions*, you find yourselves at the last among the proud in heart that are sent empty away."

The old man closed the small gate, and walked slowly to the cottage. The young men, silent and grave, went their way.

CHAPTER IV.

"In the day when I cried, thou answeredst me, and strengthenedst me with strength in my soul."—Ps. cxxxviii. 2.

"WHAT can be the matter?" said the squire, who was standing at the window of the dining-room. "There is Frank rushing up the garden path, evidently anxious about something."

Alice quickly left her seat, and joined her father at the window. "He is quite pale," she said, hastening to meet her brother.

But Frank was already in the room. "An accident, father, in the village! I have run up to fetch a horse, for I must go over to Coniston to fetch the doctor."

"Who is hurt, Frank?" anxiously inquired Alice.

Frank hesitated. He knew that he should distress his sister by telling her that it was old Robin who had met with a serious accident.

Alice guessed his thoughts. "O Frank!" she exclaimed, "not Robin, I hope."

"Don't be alarmed, Alice, it may not be bad after all, though I am sorry to say it is

old Robin. He has been thrown down by a runaway horse and carriage."

"How did it happen, Frank?" said his father.

"I was coming home," Frank replied, "across the Carr Lea, and just as I was clearing the stile into the road, I heard the sound of a carriage going too fast to be all right. So I hastened on into the village, and there, at the corner of the school-house, I saw a group of people, and knew directly that there was some accident. To my horror, I saw it was old Robin; they were just preparing to carry him to his cottage. I did not stay to ask any questions, for I knew that the best thing I could do was to run and fetch the doctor."

"That's right, my boy," said the squire, "and take the gig that the doctor may come back with you."

"Well, father, I thought of that, and told George to be quick and bring it round. I met him happily, as I came into the carriage road."

"Here it is, Frank, make haste,—if Mr. Forman is not at home," said the squire, speaking through the open window, "drive

on to Barton Chase, and bring Dr. Gordon. He is a man," he added, turning to his wife, "who is always ready for a kind action. Poor old Robin ! He shall have all the care that we can give. Cheer up, Aly !" said the kind-hearted squire who saw the tears in his daughter's eyes. "We must hope for the best. Your old favourite has fine health in his favour."

"And a quiet mind," said her mother. "That will do more for him than all the help that any one can give."

"That is true," said Captain Davenne, "it was only the other day that Dr. King was saying that, in a medical point of view, doctors knew full well the value of true religion, there being twice the chance for the body when the mind is at peace."

"May I go to him, mother?" asked Alice. "I could stay with him till the doctor arrives."

"It would be better to wait a little, my child, for old Robin ought surely to be kept very quiet. He is so fond of you, that your coming would be sure to excite him. I will send nurse Luff to him directly; he could not be in better hands."

“ Yes, Alice,” said the squire, “ your mother is right. The kindest thing to Robin is to leave him quiet just now. Wait an hour or two, and then go ; and take some grapes with you, that the old man may have them during the night.”

Very soon after this, Alice, accompanied by her uncle, stood at the door of old Robin’s cottage.

“ You had better go in alone, Alice,” said Captain Davenne, “ he may not care to see a stranger. I will wait for you on the green, under the old tree. Do not forget the grapes,” he added, for Alice in her anxiety had left the basket in his hand.

Alice opened the door gently and entered the cottage. There was no one in the little kitchen. There was no sound but the tick of the old clock in the corner. The well-worn Bible was on a table close to the window, and the old man’s spectacles lay upon it. As Alice looked upon them, she said within herself, “ Happy old man ! though your outward eye may no longer rest upon this blessed book, you have a better portion, for the eyes of your soul have been opened whereby you can see God.”

The slight movement made by Alice's entrance was heard by the nurse, who came down directly.

"How is he now, nurse?" asked Alice.

"He is suffering very badly, ma'am. The doctor says that it is impossible to set the leg at present. He said he would call again soon. It makes my heart ache to see the good old man in pain. He is so patient too," she added.

"Dear old Robin!" sighed Alice.

"You will go up, won't you, ma'am? he has been talking of you, and wanting to see you. Young Alan is with him. The lad seems very fond of him; he has not left him since the accident."

"Do you know how it happened, nurse? They say that the old man was hurt in saving a little child in the wood, from a runaway horse. The carriage knocked him down, and though the wheel did not go over him, his leg was broken by the fall."

"It was just like him," said Alice, "always doing good, and never sparing himself. But now, nurse, I will go up, for our talking here may disturb him."

The bed on which the old man lay was close to the window, which was open, to admit the soft evening air which gently stirred the thin grey hair that lay upon the pillow. The old man's eyes were closed, and Alice was grieved to notice the expression of pain that was perceptible on his face. Alan was standing at the side of the bed, when the lady entered. He moved away, to allow her to take his place.

"He is so thirsty, ma'am; I am going to fetch him some more water."

Old Robin opened his eyes, hearing these words. He recognised Alice and smiled. It was a smile bright and fleeting as an October ray. He tried to speak, but the effort failed.

"Here are some grapes for you, old Robin," said Alice, "some of papa's early grapes. They will assuage your thirst better than water."

The old man's lips moved again. There was a sudden expression upon his aged features, that told of a holy thought within, as the radiant edges of an evening cloud bear witness to the sun behind. Alice bent her ear to the feeble voice.

"Shall the disciple be above his master?"

whispered the old man, "when HE thirsted, they gave HIM vinegar to drink."

The ~~sudden~~ tears overflowed Alice's eyes at this proof of Christian constancy. Pain and trial had but deepened the channel in which the love of the aged disciple was flowing towards his crucified Lord and Saviour. The sacred flame was burning all the brighter for the darkened setting of the troubled hour.

Robin perceived the tears on Alice's cheek, and thought that she was pained to witness his suffering.

"Do not weep, lady," he said, "it is well."

"I know it is, dear Robin," she said, trying to smile through her tears. "The God whom you serve constantly is able to deliver you from all mistrust of His love, or impatience in your sufferings."

"He is able," murmured the old man, "and He is willing."

He closed his eyes again, while an expression of pain passed over his features. The nurse entered the room and whispered to Alice that the doctor had returned. As Alice moved from her chair, the old man put out

his hand, which she took into hers, while she stooped down to say farewell. The feeble voice spoke again,—

“ Will you say those verses you wrote in my Bible ?”

“ I will,” Alice replied, and bending over him she repeated, in a soft voice, the following words,—

“ One there is above all others;
Oh, how He loves!
His is love beyond a brother's;
Oh, how He loves!

Earthly friends may pain and grieve thee,
One day kind, the next day leave thee,
But this Friend will ne'er deceive thee;
Oh, how He loves!”

“ Thank you, ma'am,” said the old man. Alice pressed the offered hand, and gently moving, left the room.

At a late hour that night, Alan was standing alone in the little garden of Robin's cottage. His affection for the old man was, like every other part of his ardent nature, strong and real. He had sought and obtained leave to remain during the first night of watching, and now he stood for a few minutes in the garden before entering the cottage. His earnest eyes were intent upon the midnight sky. It was

a lovely summer-firmament, and those bright, watching eyes above seemed to find a response in the solemn and radiant thoughts that filled Alan's young heart. "*Nothing that defileth,*" seemed written in letters of living light upon that glorious heaven. Then, for the first time he seemed to realise the full value of that faith which he now saw was mightiest in a Christian in the hour of trial. "When trouble comes to you, Will Davis," he said, speaking his thoughts aloud, "or to *me*, what shall *we* have to lean upon?" He looked up at the still open casement, from whence not a sound of murmur disturbed the quiet air, and the words which the old man had spoken on that very spot, the night before, now returned to his memory with a force and vividness that seemed like the waking to a new life. From out of that earnest speech of Robin's, three words stood now before him in characters of fire,—"*Begin to pray.*" There was one short form of prayer that instantly came into his mind, simple enough for a child, but all-sufficient for eternity. "*God be merciful to me a sinner!*" He breathed the words slowly, but with the mighty energy of a new-born faith.

The soft night-wind alone made response to the sounds. But shall any man say they were unheard in heaven?" Blessed be God, not while there is One above who, while He *"tellet*h the number of the stars, gathereth together the outcast, and healeth the broken in heart."

CHAPTER V.

"And we have seen, and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world."—1 JOHN IV. 14.

THREE months had passed away since the day of old Robin's accident. The summer-time was gone, but not the summer brightness, for that seemed to linger long and lovingly around the autumn hours, giving a pledge and an earnest of returning sunshine, which the old year cherished in faith and hope that—

"What the past hath given, the future gives as well."

The old man was still in his room. The doctor's fears had been realised. As it sometimes happens in old age, the broken limb would not unite. There was no help for it, old Robin would be bed-ridden for the rest of his earthly pilgrimage. The doctor was a kind-hearted man. He felt grieved at the old man's prospect of helplessness, and expressed the greatest concern for him. He dreaded to destroy the last hope which Robin was one day expressing of being able, after a time, to walk to the favourite old

oak. Great was his surprise, however, to witness the old man's composure when the truth was told him. The child-like trust which he had witnessed in Robin during the whole course of his illness, had made a great impression on him. Dr. Gordon was a man that feared God, and placed his trust in a Saviour's atoning Blood, but, from some deficiency of early instruction, he failed to take the full comfort that flows from an unreserved belief in God's fatherly love. In his own frank and truthful manner, he confessed this to the old man. "How is it," he said, "that there is so much difference between us? I don't believe there is any fear in your love, while, at times, I ask myself, is there any love in my fear? how is it, Robin? don't be afraid to preach to me. I am sure you can teach me a great many things."

Old Robin shook his head. "There is only one Teacher, sir, and His lessons are given for the asking."

"That is true, Robin, but you know that it is His will that we should be ministers of His grace to each other. And I want you to give me the secret of that wonderful rest which

your mind seems always to possess, even in the midst of bodily pain. You never seem troubled either, by mental perplexities, and, O Robin, there are so many of these in this weary world ! ”

“ Sir,” said the old man, looking up with his own meek smile into the manly and ingenuous face of the speaker, “ I humbly trust that it is the presence of the Spirit of Christ within me, enabling me to say, Abba, Father ! ”

There was a short silence; then Dr. Gordon said : “ The fact is, I believe that I begin at the wrong end. I am always fearing lest my repentance be not sufficient to *make* God my Father, whereas you start on the belief of his being your Father already. That is the difference, and a very great difference it is. Your faith is hard to attain, Robin.”

“ With men impossible, dear sir, for faith is the gift of God. But oh,” the old man continued in his earnest way, “ it is only our *pride* that makes it difficult ! If we were emptied of self, we should cease to wonder at God’s way of saving us. He is too great a God to allow a sinner any part in his work of pardon. Do you know, sir, that Mr. Arnot,

our clergyman, was explaining this subject to me only yesterday. He said he believed that one reason why so many Christians began at the wrong end, is, because the ministers of God's word do not speak sufficiently of the love of God the Father. He said, if we read the Gospels attentively, and especially the Gospel of St. John, we should see how differently the Lord Jesus taught. Do you remember, sir, the very first words spoken by our Lord concerning his work? He called it his "*Father's business.*"

"I never noticed that," said Dr. Gordon, "they are very significant words."

The old man continued: "It's a blessed truth that Jesus came to reveal the Father. We may believe that Christ is the Way, but it will be only half the truth if we do not believe that He is the Way to the Father. Ah, sir, this is the only sure road to that repentance which is precious in the sight of God!"

Dr. Gordon did not reply, but the words of the old man brought with them a resistless conviction of their truth. "I believe you are right, Robin," he said at length, "you are right. After all, the prodigal son did not

truly repent till he remembered his father's love, and believed in its continuance. And I rather think you are right, too, when you say that it is pride that sets us blundering at the wrong end. We think of our feeble love to God, instead of God's great love in Christ to us. We look at the broken reflection in the water, instead of at the steadfast sun in the heavens. By the way," added the Doctor as he rose to go, "talking of pride puts me in mind of what I was going to forget. Your friend, Miss Davenne, has told me of a certain proverb of yours, about which you had promised the boys a tale on that very day of your accident, my poor fellow. She wants me to consent to your being carried to the favourite oak-tree, one afternoon this week, while this fine weather lasts. You see, she told me what the proverb was, and how you interpreted it. Poor Robin," the kind doctor concluded, "you little thought that so much real 'water-porridge' was in store for you."

"It is all right, sir," was the cheerful reply of the old man, "a little spare diet is necessary for us all at times, and it is wholesome, too," he added, smiling, "for sweet sleep comes with it."

“You are fond of parables, Robin.”

“Yes, sir, they are God’s way of teaching His dull children.”

“Well, good-bye, Robin; I suppose that the ‘spare diet’ means the lowly mind.”

“Yes, sir, it does, for so God giveth His beloved sleep.” .

CHAPTER VI.

"Be content with such things as ye have, for he hath said, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee."—HEB. xiii. 5.

"Now for the story, Master Robin!" cried the lads. The old man had been carefully placed on a mattress under the oak tree, and around him was the same group which had listened to his words on the evening before his accident, with the exception of one person—Captain Davenne—who was now absent from the Hall.

"Are you quite comfortable, Robin?" inquired Alice; "that is the first thing."

"Quite, thank you, dear lady."

"Then you must please begin," she said, "for some of these young listeners have only half an hour before they return to school."

So the old man began :—

"It was my mother who taught me the lesson of contentment. Boy as I was, I could see that my father did not find the lesson easy. He was a kind father to me and my brother (I had but one); and he was a good husband, and loved his home. But he was

always fretting himself about the money, and wishing that he might have more of it, that he might do as other people did who were more prosperous than he was. My mother had a wonderful way of cheering him, and of bringing back a feeling of contentment into his heart. And, bad as times might be, she never seemed to lose her faith in a Father in heaven. The winter I remember best was a severe one. There was a great deal of illness in our village, and work was very scarce. My father used to look so grave and gloomy. When we came from school we often found him sitting at the table with his head buried in his hands. One day I had got a book of pictures, and was turning over the pages in front of the kitchen-fire. My father was seated in the chimney-corner, silent and moody. My mother was clearing away from the table the remains of our supper of bread and potatoes, for we did not taste much meat that winter. At last my father looked up and said, 'It is very hard, Mary, to see that fellow Dick (he was my father's brother) living like a prince, while we have nothing but bread.' My mother had the loaf in her hands that minute. She

stopped, and said, 'Nothing but bread, dear husband ! why, bread is *every* thing. Instead of grumbling because we have no meat, let us say, 'Thank God who giveth bread to strengthen man's heart.' 'That is all quite right, I know, Mary, but when I looked in just now at Dick's cottage, and saw his little ones feasting on a hot supper, while mine had only bread and potatoes, I could hardly bear it.' Ah," said old Robin, shaking his head, "how soon are evil seeds dropped into the young mind by wrong words ! I know that while my father spoke I felt many foolish and sinful thoughts rise in my heart. But they were checked by the gentle voice of my mother. She had come near my father, and had placed her hand upon his shoulder. She looked like his good angel. 'Joseph,' she said 'why did you go to Dick's cottage to-night ? You promised me not to go along with him. You know that he will only bring you into harm, for he fears not God or man. As to his hot suppers, they bode no good, Joseph. You know that they will be his ruin some day. Husband, husband, be content ; the blessing of God is better than all the

feasting and all the riches of this world.' My father was silent a few minutes; while we were wondering in our minds what my mother meant when she said that my uncle's hot suppers would be his ruin. But we soon found that out, as you shall hear. 'Well, Mary,' said my father at last, 'you are right; but times are really so bad just now, I don't see where the work is to come from.' 'That is what an infidel would say,' my mother replied, 'a man who does not believe there is a God in heaven. But you, Joseph—you who teach your little ones to say, "Our Father which art in heaven,"—*you* should not speak so.' 'I wish I was like you, Mary,' said my father. 'You are always contented and hopeful. But, indeed, it is a bad winter for us all. The work has stopped at the Hall on account of the frost, and where I am to get a job I don't know. I would give something, wife, to be as quiet as you are, and believe that it will be all right in the end. How do you manage it?' I remember my mother's beautiful smile as she made answer: 'I ask God, for Christ's sake, to give me the same trust in His love as my children have in my

love. Why don't you do the same, Joseph? You see that God answers my prayer, why should he not answer yours? Don't you think that the Lord Jesus meant what He said: "Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name he will do it?" He was silent; but we could see that his face was getting brighter, and that the dark cloud was almost gone. 'Now, Joe,' said my mother, 'will you let me read you something which I am never tired of reading myself?' She rose, and, going to a chest of drawers, took out a small book. She brought her chair close to my father, and sat down to read. There were many passages in that book which I could see she had marked with a pencil-line. It might be, perhaps, in some trying hour when things seemed to go against her, and she needed strength and comfort from above."

"Ah!" interrupted Alice, "that was the book you were speaking to me about the other day,—'Hymns of Faith and Hope.'"

"Yes, lady, and there was a charm in those verses which, boy as I was, fastened itself upon me. So much so, that, in after years,

when I left home, I begged my mother to give me the book. Many is the time that I have read it since then, and fancied that I still heard my mother's voice as she sat reading to my father on that evening."

"And what did your father say to it, Robin?" asked Alice, "do you remember?"

"Yes, ma'am, I recollect everything that happened that evening as clear as if it was yesterday. 'Well, wife,' he said, as my mother closed the book, 'you must ask God to forgive me for doubting his love and providence. And you, my lad,' for I had left my picture-book and was standing at my mother's knee, 'mind you always listen to what your mother teaches you, and be always content and thankful.' My mother then rose to take us to bed. I see her standing there, with the candle in her hand. 'After all, Joseph,' she said, 'we get one good thing which people who have hot suppers are obliged to do without.' 'What's that, my lass?' said my father. 'Why, sleep, sweet, sound sleep,' she replied, with that bright smile of hers which always made me think of the sun

coming into a room, 'depend upon it, husband, the proverb is true :—

"The sweetest sleep is the sleep on water-porridge."

And now," old Robin went on, "I am coming to the end of my story. Something happened about a month after, which completely cured my father of his grumbling. We never afterwards heard a sound of murmur from his lips. You know, boys, I told you we wondered what my mother meant when she said that my uncle's hot suppers would be his ruin. It soon became clear to us. I shall never forget that night. It was a stormy night, dark with wind and rain. My brother and I were with our mother in the kitchen, the door of which was open, so that by-and-by, when the house-door opened, we could see my father talking to some one outside. We soon recognised my uncle's voice. We heard him say, 'Come, Joe, don't be stupid. Say you'll come with me.' How anxious our mother looked all the while they remained talking. Presently the door was closed again, and my father came into the kitchen. 'Mary,' he said, 'that fellow Dick is at me

again. He will have me go with him to-night.' 'Nay, Joseph,' she said, 'you will not, surely.' 'Well, Mary,' I have, as they say, half a mind to go. He says he will show me something by which I can benefit myself and family. He kept taunting me with the hard fare which my children had; so different from his own way of living; and I could not stand it.' My mother was silent, but a tear was slowly stealing down her cheek. 'Come, wife, don't take on,' said my father kindly. He never liked to see her cry; she cried so seldom. 'If I did go this once, I would promise you never to go again.' 'But it is just this once that may ruin you, dear Joe. It cannot be right to go with Dick, for you know he has no fear of God; and the Bible says, if sinners entice us, we are not to hearken or consent. O Joseph! do not disobey the word of God. It is better to starve than to grieve Him who gave his blood to save us from sin.' My mother did not say any more. She never talked on (as some wives do) at her husband. Her words were always few, but they were strong though gentle. I can see now that this was the secret of her influence over my father. Well, about half an hour after, there was

a knock outside. My father went to the door. We heard him say, 'I am not going with you, Dick.' My uncle made some angry reply; we could catch the words, 'silly wife,' 'stupid fellow,' and then he was gone. My father was silent and grave the rest of the evening, and then we all went to bed. I remember it was a long time before I could get to sleep. The rain was driving heavily against the windows, and the wind was moaning round the house. About two o'clock in the morning, a sudden noise roused my brother and myself. It seemed to come from the outside door. We lay quiet, expecting to hear it again. It was repeated two or three times. 'Let us wake father,' said my brother. 'No,' said I, 'let us wait. Indeed he is awake already; don't you hear the window opening in his room? What can be the matter?' We stood at the door, shaking in the cold, straining our ears to catch the words that my father was speaking to some one outside. The wind lulled at this moment. 'It is Aunt Bessy's voice,' we both exclaimed. Then we heard my father go down stairs, and my mother following. Unable any longer to resist the desire to

know what was going on, we opened our door very gently, and stole out upon the landing. 'What is it, Bess?' we heard my father say, as he let my aunt in. A burst of loud weeping was the only reply. 'Has anything happened to Dick?' my father asked in a hurried voice. 'He is killed! he is killed!' shrieked my aunt. Oh, what a cry of agony that was! I shall never forget it. We trembled as we heard it. 'Dick killed!' said my father in a hoarse voice; 'God forbid! where is he? let me go to him. But do tell us what has happened.' We could not hear distinctly what my aunt said. Her grief was so excessive; but we heard enough to frighten us in the few words we caught—'guns,' 'game-keepers,' 'Bury jail,' and 'murder.' Half dead with cold and terror, we crept back to our beds. What a night it was too! The rain was lashing against the casement, and the wind seemed to echo the wail of the broken-hearted woman. We whispered to each other, wondering whether our mother would come to us. She did come. After half an hour, when the house was hushed again, and all was still below, we heard her step on the stairs. We

called to her, and she came into our room, and sat down on a chair between our beds. At that moment, the moon shone out from behind the driving clouds, and we could see how anxious my mother's face was. 'Mother,' I asked, 'what is poaching, is it murder?' My mother answered, laying her hand on my shoulder, 'It is self-murder, my child; for it sometimes costs a man his life in this world, and, alas, in the next world too. Do you remember,' she went on, seeing that we looked puzzled, 'do you remember my saying some time ago, that your uncle's hot suppers would bring him into trouble?' 'Yes, yes,' we said together. 'Well,' she continued; 'now the trouble is come. I will tell you how it is. The reason why your uncle had hot suppers while we had bread and potatoes is because he took what did not belong to him. He took the game which belongs to the squire at the hall. He brought it home, and sold it, and what he could not sell, was cooked into hot meals for his wife and children. This is what is called poaching. Some thoughtless people say there is a difference between stealing and poaching, but no one who loves the truth can think so

for a moment. Suppose that you were hungry,' said my mother to us, 'and that you went to Farmer Lovat's poultry-yard and took one of his best black hens, which he had reared for himself and fed, and taken care of, what would that be?' 'Stealing,' we both said. 'And if, instead of going to Farmer Lovat's you went to the Park, which is so large that there would not be so much danger of being seen, and you took away some of the squire's hares, or pheasants, or partridges, all of which had cost the squire a great deal of money to feed and take care of, what would that be?' 'Stealing,' we exclaimed again. 'Would there be any difference between the thefts?' 'Not a bit,' we replied. 'Think, too,' said my mother, 'what conscience has to say to these bad men. It whispers to them that they are wrong, that they are going to break God's commandment, *Thou shalt not steal*, and so they feel afraid, and they wait till the night comes, and the darkness hides them from the eyes of their fellow-creatures; forgetting that no darkness can hide us from God.' We were silent for a while, and then we asked what had happened to our uncle, whether he was really killed.

'We hope not,' she answered, 'your father has gone off directly with the poor wife, in search of tidings. All your aunt knew was that one of the poachers had run to her house and roused her up with the dreadful news that her husband had been caught by the gamekeepers, that there had been a serious affray, in which he had seen your uncle knocked down, that the police was coming up, and that he had made haste to be off. 'O mother,' we said, 'what a good thing it is, that father did not go with Uncle Dick.' My mother clasped her hands together. 'Let us thank God, my children,' she said; and, rising from her chair, she knelt at the foot of the bed, and told us to fold our hands in prayer, while she thanked God for his mercy in saving our father from sin, and ourselves from shame and sorrow. 'Many a time have I remembered that prayer, dear lady,' said old Robin, turning to Miss Davenne. Many a time has it kept me strong against temptation.' "

"I can believe that," said Alice. "Ah, there would be fewer bad sons if there were more praying mothers. And what did your father say to all this, Robin?"

“Our first thought,” old Robin replied, “was whether we should see him the next morning, and whether he would say anything to us about the affair. We met him at breakfast; he looked very grave and serious, but his manner to us was very kind, and kinder still to my mother. We did not like to ask any questions; but, as we were leaving the house for school, my father called us back. ‘Come here, boys,’ he said, ‘I have something to say to you. Your mother has told you what has happened to your uncle.’ ‘Is he dead, father?’ I asked. ‘No, my lad; thank God it’s not quite so bad, though it’s bad enough. He was only stunned; but he had wounded one of the gamekeepers badly, and so he was taken off to Bury Jail. But what I want to say to you, my boys, is this,—if I had not taken heed to your mother’s counsels, I should have gone with your uncle yesternight. See what would have come to us if I had done so. Take a lesson—never give heed to bad men when they try to draw you along with them into sin. Boys, never forget what your mother teaches you. Be always content, even if your lot is poor and lowly, for a thankful heart is better than a

full table.' We looked at our mother; the tears stood in her eyes, though her own bright smile was there, as she said to us while we closed the door, ' You see, my sons, the proverb is true after all,—

"The sweetest sleep is the sleep on water-porridge." " "

"Thank you, Robin," said Miss Davenne, when the old man had ended his tale. " I hope you have not tired yourself by telling us this interesting story. How well you remember the days of your boyhood!"

"It is all strangely clear," Robin replied, "as clear as if it happened yesterday. Ah, dear lady, I can look back to many a struggle, in the days of my manhood, between temptation and the remembrance of my mother's faith."

"Well, Robin," said Alice, "I am sure your mother left her own contentment to you as a legacy. No one could be more at peace than you are with all things in heaven and earth."

"It was not always so," said the old man gravely. "It was not till I saw, and believed that Christ had died for my sins, that I learnt to trust in a Father's love and care."

"And yet," said Alice, "there are many

Christians who believe in the forgiveness of their sins, who cannot trust God for their earthly life."

"Do not say 'cannot,' but '*will* not,' dear lady," Robin replied. "It is nothing but pride which prevents us from taking the great God at his word. He calls himself 'our Father,' in order that we may give him the heart of a child."

"Yes," said Alice; "and the strongest feature in the life of a child is that he is never anxious for the morrow. His only care is to remain in the presence of his parent, and his only grief is when that parent leaves him. Ah, Robin, we may well be told that except we become as little children we cannot enter God's kingdom. But now," she added, "I do not mean to let you remain here any longer. You may take cold; so now, let us all move."

"Happy old man!" said Alice Davenne to herself as she walked home, after having seen old Robin carefully conveyed to his cottage. "Happy indeed! You have that which God alone can give—the peace of a lowly heart. You are a rich man, Robin, all things are yours, and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's."

CHAPTER VII.

"For this God is our God for ever and ever:

He will be our guide even unto death."—Pa. xlviii. 14.

A TWELVEMONTH had passed away, and the bright summer-time had come round again. But this year it brought a deep shadow on old Robin's path. Alice Davenne was about to leave the home of her childhood and youth as a bride. At the prospect of parting with one who, by the daily practice of Christian loveliness, had endeared herself to all around, sadness filled all hearts, from the Hall to the cottage and the village school; and by no one would the lowly lady be more missed than by old Robin. For years had Alice Davenne been his solace and chief comfort, while Alice herself had found a meet return for the gladness she gave, in the strengthening of her own faith under the influence of this aged Christian's example.

We have seen a dark and rugged fir, around whose thick trunk a tender sapling had entwined itself. We have noticed how the delicate green of the early foliage lay among

the mass of dark leaves, like "sunshine in a cloudy place," and we have said, how beautiful is the energy of contrast, how wonderful is God's law for mutual support and sympathy! Nature is full of these contrasts, and, thank God, it is human life and human friendship. Robin felt the trial acutely; but, as the law of Christ has power to unlearn the law of self, so this aged Christian was able to thank God for the fair promise of a happy future that lay before this beloved lady, although he knew that for himself one avenue of earthly comfort was now for ever closed.

The wedding-bells rang out a merry peal from the ivy-covered tower as the bridal party moved along the small pathway of the churchyard towards the gate, in front of which a long line of carriages was waiting, bright with the usual tokens of wedding joy. Only once did the young bride lift her eyes from that narrow path so familiar to her. She looked towards one corner of the churchyard, where, on a couch provided for the purpose, lay old Robin with uncovered head, his eyes fastened upon the fair bride, and

his lips moving in words of prayer and blessing.

But this was not to be the farewell. At Alice's request Robin was carried to the Hall to join in the festivities of the day, and also to afford herself an opportunity of receiving from her old friend a few words which should hereafter bear the indelible impress of the parting hour.

At a late hour in the afternoon, Alice, now Lady Ruthven, stood before him in her travelling dress. "One more and a last chat with you, dear old Robin," she said; "you must give me your blessing and a few words of parting counsel. How much I shall miss your advice!"

The old man was too much moved to reply. There is an electric touch in human presence which opens the flood-gates of feeling and lets the bitter waters in upon the soul. But it was only for a moment or two. Robin was too unselfish to add his own burden to that which Alice had to bear in the moment of parting from her home.

"God will be your counsellor, dear lady," he replied, "and my comforter. I shall miss you as the captive misses the light of heaven."

Alice sat down near the old man and spoke kindly and cheerfully to him; but the time was short, and they could only enjoy a few words together. When Alice rose to go, the old man said,—

“May God bless you, and reward you for all the kindness you have shown me. And He *will*, for as you have done it to one who is indeed the least of his children, you have done it unto Him.”

The tears fell on the lady’s cheek. “I shall never forget you, Robin—you know that—and if it please God, we shall meet again.”

“As He will,” said the old man gently. In His hand are all the corners of the earth. We shall not be so far from each other, dear lady, after all, if we are still in the shelter of His hand.”

“This shall be our comfort, dear Robin,” said Alice. “And now, farewell. May God be with us both.”

The old man’s voice trembled as he said —“The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you.”

The lady closed the door, and Robin was alone.

This was not the only farewell that day. At a late hour in the evening, a low knock was heard at the door of Robin's cottage, and the youth, Alan, entered.

"I am late, I fear," he said to the woman that let him in.

"He is not asleep," she replied. "You had better go up at once."

The old man put out his hand as Alan came up to his bedside. "I expected you, my son," he said, with his ready smile. "I heard you were going to-morrow, and I felt sure that you would not leave without saying, Good-bye."

"I should think not, indeed," said the young man warmly. "But I am sorry it is so late, for I wanted to say a great many things to you."

"Do not mind the hour for me," said Robin. "There is no need of night when there is no work in the day. I should have grieved to let you go without a parting word. You have been like a son to me, Alan. May the Lord bless you for it."

"Don't talk of that, Robin, think what you have been to me. I don't know how I am to get on without you. I feel as if I should be all wrong when I leave you."

"Not so," Robin replied. "It is of God that we get help and strength from our friends, and when He takes them away, it is that He may prove the measure of our own strength, whether we are leaning upon Him or not."

"It will be so hard to be right, in a large town, and at that busy factory," said the young man, "don't you think so?"

"Satan has many devices," the old man replied. "He would always persuade us that we should be better anywhere but where God has placed us. No, Alan, my boy, the foe is *within*, not without. If the heart is at enmity with God, there is as much danger in the quiet valley as the crowded street, in the lonely cell as the busy factory. Nevertheless, Alan, take heed that sinners entice you not. Go not with men who like to cavil at God's word. The companion of fools shall be destroyed."

The colour rose in Alan's cheek. "How is it, Robin," he said, "that I seem to be more in danger that way?"

"Get good out of it," said the old man energetically, "get good out of it. Let it be to you the best proof of the truth of the Bible,

and then you will have cause to bless God that you saw the evil of your heart. The Bible is not true, if men are not prone to evil, and this proneness to evil is the cause of all unbelief. Man thereby has a greater relish for what is false than for what is true. But, oh ! Alan ! beware of cold, unbelieving cavils, and doubts of God's word. They are Satan's chief tools. He is always very busy with them, and no marvel, for they prevent a man from going to God for the pardon of his sins."

Alan was silent. Then he spoke again. "Persons are so different, Robin. Some are content to eat their bread without knowing how the wheat grows, or how the corn is ground ; while others are always craving after fresh knowledge. I am one of these. I long to know something more of the unseen world, and of God. It is so difficult to sit down quietly, and believe without understanding—without making all things square, as I call it."

The old man smiled, but with an expression of yearning interest, as he listened to the young man's words. They recalled to him the days of his own youth, when he too had struggled through the same dark waters.

"And yet, my son," he said, "to obey is better than sacrifice. Yes, Alan, we *must sit down* before we are fed. The proud stand afar off, while the meek shall eat and be satisfied. But, Alan, when you are perplexing yourself with doubts, remember this, *the Bible is not meant to teach us what God is in himself* (how could we understand that?) *but what he is in relation to ourselves.* Is not that reasonable?"

"It is a striking thought," the young man replied, "it will fasten itself in my mind."

"Yes," continued Robin, "and as such, the Bible makes clear to us quite enough for our peace and comfort. We feel that we are helpless—it tells us of a Father. We feel that we are guilty—it tells us of a Saviour. We feel that we are unholy—it tells us of a Spirit to cleanse and renew. What do we want more, my son?"

"Ay, what indeed?" Alan responded in a low but earnest voice.

The old man went on: "There is one thing against which I would caution you. We are all of us too apt to pity ourselves in religious difficulties. We call ourselves unhappy, when we should be holding ourselves guilty. Do

not pity yourself, Alan, my son, *leave that to God*. Like as a father even so He pitieth us, blessed be His name. Where indeed should we be, if it were otherwise? but the fact of God's pitying us should be just the very reason for our not pitying ourselves. The language of our heart should always be, "*Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.*"

The young man looked at the small clock which was pointing to the hour of eleven. "Are you sure that I do not weary you, Robin? it is getting late for you."

"Quite sure," the old man replied, "I like to have you with me as long as I can."

"And I am sure I prize your parting counsel more than any words of mine can express," said Alan, looking affectionately at his old friend. "Do you know, I think that all those counsels may be summed up in one word—'lowliness.'"

"Not all, my son, there is another word that must be joined to it, and that is diligence. Yes, Alan, be diligent in seeking God. It is true that God first seeks us, long, long before we seek him; but it is equally true that unless

we seek we shall not find. There's my Bible close to you, Alan. Open it at the second chapter of the book of Proverbs, and read the first six verses—will you?"

The young man did so.

"My son, if thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee: so that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding; yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; if thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God."

"See what man has to do," said Robin, after Alan had finished. "Mark the words—they are strong ones. 'Receive,'—'hide,'—'incline the ear'—'apply the heart,'—'lift up the voice'—'seek, and search as for hid treasures'—*then*, and not till then, mark, shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God. God grant you this diligence, Alan."

"It's hard to get the will to do all this," said the young man in a low voice.

"Hard only to our pride" Robin replied.

"It is hard if we try to find it within ourselves; easy if we go straight to God, and ask him to give it us. Now read another passage, my son, on the other side of the subject—the 77th and 78th verses of the first chapter of St. Luke."

Alan obeyed.

"To give knowledge of salvation unto his people, by the remission of their sins, through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the day-spring from on high hath visited us."

"You see, Alan," said the old man, "God's mercy stands at one end, and man's diligence at the other. What God hath joined together, let no man put asunder. Yes, Alan, light comes from above, but *it comes to wake us up to work.*"

"The Bible is certainly a wonderful book," said Alan. It fits in with so many different wants of our nature. O Robin! I hope that I shall not fall again into those sinful doubts and cavils. I am sure they are a temptation from Satan."

"And do not forget that one point, Alan, that I have always tried to impress upon you; I mean, that it is *pride* which lies at the root of our religious difficulties."

"Your proverb will keep me in mind of that," said Alan, smiling. "I am sure there is a great deal of truth in it."

"It holds good for the soul more than for the body," said the old man. "There are some weakly bodies that sleep the better for better fare, but there never was a soul yet that found health in its pride. Get a lowly heart from God, my beloved son, get a lowly mind. It is only when we struggle in God's hand that we hurt ourselves. Remember that, Alan, and let Patience have her perfect work in you."

"Now, I must go," said Alan, rising, and taking the hand of his old friend. "May God bless you, Robin, for you have been better than a father to me."

"Ah, Alan! it will be a sore missing to me when you are gone, and Miss Alice gone too. But God will make up in some way. He never takes a good thing away without giving something better."

"You never lose your faith in that," said the young man."

"Alas! my son, it is often very weak. We are wise in matters of earth, but slow in

matters of heaven. When the stream is dry we hasten to the fountain, and there get refreshed. But when our earthly joys are taken, we are apt to turn away from God. Yet blessed be God," he continued, "that fountain is ever full and ever flowing."

A few minutes after, Robin was alone. He lay with closed eyes and folded hands. His lips were gently repeating these words:—

"Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever."

Old Robin was alone. Alone in the sense in which mortals speak, when all earthly sources of comfort are removed. But not alone in the sense of that better fellowship which exists between a human spirit and its God.

"Gales from Heaven, if so He will,
Sweeter melodies can wake,
On the lonely mountain rill
Than the meeting waters make.
Who hath the Father and the Son,
May be left, but not alone."

What was the secret of old Robin's contentment? It was this: his soul had found its true and destined food. This food was *the will of God*, the same whereof the Lord Jesus

himself tasted ; as his own words attest : “ *I have meat to eat that ye know not of. My meat is to do the will of Him that sent me.*”

What was true of the Blessed Lord in his work of salvation, is equally true of every soul that receives and accepts that work. But we are long and late in learning this, for the dust of earth is more congenial fare than the light of heaven. God is merciful and forbearing ; he suffers us to eat of the meat that perishes, in order that we may hunger again, and feel that nothing but the bread from heaven can satisfy our immortal souls. All learn this—only with this difference. Some learn it in the bitterness of creature disappointment. Others, in the possession of that mysterious peace, which, like a river, flows deeper and deeper, till it ends in the ocean of everlasting joy.

One word more. “ *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*” Emptied of themselves, and leaning upon God, they alone can receive the truths of God’s word. We must go and sit down in the lowest room, if we would hear the Master’s voice calling us to higher faith and higher knowledge. The reason of this is plain. It is with

the *heart* that man believeth. With the pride of intellect, the law of Christ has nothing to do. While men are arguing, in these days, with strong words on questions of doctrine, the poor in spirit are feeding on those sacred truths with the unquestioning obedience of love, finding in them the joy and strength of their souls. While the learned are disputing on the nature of the prescription, the broken in heart are pressing round the great Physician, knowing that as many as touch him shall be made perfectly whole. "The one sort, because they enjoy not dispute ; the other dispute not, because they enjoy." Among such was old Robin. Would that there were many more such witnesses to the truth among those that profess and call themselves Christians. There would be less infidelity in the land, for these are the "true witnesses that deliver souls" (Prov. xiv. 25). We may be sure that the remembrance of old Robin's simple but strong faith was of more avail to keep young Alan from the dangerous toils of infidel reasoning, than whole volumes of divinity from the pen of the learned.

It is not the clear head so much as the

“meek and quiet spirit,” that is wanted to convince men of the reality of religion.

“*With the lowly is wisdom,*”—the wisdom that cometh from above—the wisdom which is effectual to win the souls of others, and to make their own lives legible as epistles of Christ.

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Wm. A. Johnson



